

MERTZON — By long established custom, Good Friday is the opening of the gardening season in the Shortgrass Country. From that date on until the Thursday before Easter of the next year, homeowners out here root up the earth as if the Maker has sent them a special message to go on a redecorating spree. Ninety-nine varieties of semi-edible squash are planted, scraggle brush and broom weeds are choked out by thousands of pounds of bermuda grass seeds. Water wells are taxed to their limits. For those of us who live the unblemished wilderness, life becomes as void of hope as a chronic sneezer trying to hold down a job in a glassblowing factory.

It's a mystery why the major portion of the populace wants to spend half the winter and all the temperate months defacing the natural charm of this dry country. There isn't one plausible argument why prickly pear cactus adorned by patches of frizzle-top frazzle weed isn't enough greenery to satisfy anyone.

As it is, the citizens are unhappy unless they have a hoe in one hand and a rake in the other. If they had complete control, the whole countryside would be cut up into lawns and turnip patches.

All this wouldn't be so maddening if the planters weren't so downright scornful of us lovers of natural landscaping.

We could live together in peace, if these green-thumbbed busybodies would only recognize that a few tin cans plus a dry goat hide or two are all a dwelling needs to have a homey flavor.

And now, since Mrs. Lyndon Baines Johnson has had so much to say about how the highways and byways need flowers and trees, these worshippers of morning glories and pea vines have acted as if the framers of the Constitution wouldn't put goose quill to parchment until a few petunias beds were set out around Constitution Hall.

The gardening set never does listen to the other side of the story. Not one out of ten of the gardeners will admit that 99.44 percent of the men in the Merchant Fleet are attracted to the sea simply because the briney deep had no lawns to mow or crab grass to pull. Furthermore, they ignore that the Gypsy bands have for centuries caught a steady flow of recruits from broken homes, where yard work took precedence over everything else.

Blindly, these devotees of artificial scenery desecrate our natural flora. Spring after spring is wasted away, plowing and marring the earth's beauty. Summer after summer is idled away, spraying and befouling the air with dangerous poisons, as the fate of a beautiful countryside falls to the awesome tune of creaking manure spreaders and sputtering lawn mowers.

The end is nowhere in sight. I guess when the Shortgrass County is turned into a veritable Hanging Gardens of Babylon, these destroyers of man's peace will allow us to rest. Naturally, by then, it'll be too late to reclaim a desert wilderness that fell by their ever-busy hands and tools.